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ABSTRACT

The major purposes of this study were to determine whether career awareness in children is fostered by television viewing and to explore the perceptions of teachers with regard to three factors: children's program choices, children's occupational choices and occupational role portrayals of television characters. Also investigated were status levels of portrayed occupations and identification with parent occupation. The study included 120 preschool children and 12 teachers. The results indicated that most children could name an occupation. Sex differences were found. Correlational analysis indicated that the occupational prestige level of boys' and girls' occupational choices was more strongly associated with the occupational prestige level of their favorite television character than with that of their same sex parent. Teachers were more aware of the occupational choices of male than female students. However, teachers' awareness of the roles portrayed on the six most frequently mentioned television shows was minimal. (Author/MP)

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# CAREER AWARENESS AND TELEVISION VIEWING IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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CAREER AWARENESS AND TELEVISION VIEWING IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Career awareness in young children is important to early childhood education since many attitudes form and persist relatively unchanged through life and since children as young as five do have attitudes about careers and occupations as well as opinions about the appropriateness of certain career choices for them (Leifer and Lesser 1976). Television can influence the course of vocational socialization by affecting the development of basic social identities and providing information in periods of social change (Carbarino and Turner, 1975).

Television is a major medium of cultural communication in the decade of the 70's. The television set can be found in over 97.5% of American homes (Nielsen et al, 1975) turned on daily for six hours and forty-nine minutes (Broadcasting Yearbook, 1975). Children begin to view television on a consistent basis at about 2½ years of age (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972) and average viewing hours for the preschool child (age 3-5 years) is 21 hours a week (Barcus, 1973; Stein and Friedrich, 1972). Children, by the completion of high school, spend 11,000-12,000 hours in high school and 22,000 hours watching television (Looney, 1971).

Socialization concerning occupational roles occurs largely through accidental or haphazard explosure to a variety of learning sources. The mass media play a significant part in socialization since television has been successful in teaching specific skills and in incidental learning (De Fleur, 1964). Schramm (1961) states that "the viewer goes to television for entertainment and stores up certain information without seeking it" (p. 75).

De Fleur (1964) has found that television as a source of incidental learning presents the younger viewer with a concentration of occupations

related to the law, the preoccupation with upper-status jobs, the infrequent representations of ordinary work roles and an imbalance of the sexes. The young child views the world of work through television's distortion and presentation of erroneous conceptions about occupations. De Fleur and De Fleur (1967) have found that the six-year-old has acquired definite ideas about occupational roles and the social rankings among such roles. Research has found that the more a child views television the more likely he will select a stereotyped occupational choice (Beuf, 1974).

Studies of media presentation have found television women not being presented in proportions approximating any degree of real world representation (Sternglanz & Serbin, 1974) and often in relegated roles (Miles, 1975; Kaniuga et al, 1974; Ransdell, 1973; Mills, 1974).

Research has noted that children are interested in television characters as a source of conversation (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972), as models for solution of problems (Meyer, 1973), and for identification with same sex characters (Sprafkin, 1975).

Purposes

The major purposes of this study were to determine whether career awareness in children is fostered by television viewing and to explore the perceptions of teachers with regard to 1) Children's program choices 2) Children's occupational choices and 3) Occupational role protrayals of television characters. Additionally, status levels of portrayed occupations were investigated as well as identification with parent occupation. There were two parts of this study; a pilot and a major study. A pilot study was conducted with two teachers and a sample of three boys and girls (N=12) from each teacher's classrooms in a public preschool program in Glassboro, New Jersey.

Procedures

Teachers individually responded to form I or II of the survey. The investigator individually interviewed the children. The results of the pilot study developed a single children's survey and two forms of the teacher's survey.

The major study sites were selected in order to survey volunteer teachers and their children in urban and suburban public preschool facilities and in urban and suburban Title XX centers. Twelve teachers and 120 children (60 boys and 60 girls, median age 4 years 8 months, 80 white, 29 black and one Indian child), were surveyed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Glassboro, New Jersey; Hightstown, New Jersey, and Princeton, New Jersey. Within each of the twelve classrooms, five boys and five girls were randomly selected for the study.

Teacher surveys were delivered to each teacher in her classroom. Teachers individually responded to the survey. The investigator picked up the completed surveys one week later.

The sample of children were interviewed individually by the investigator in their preschool. Arrangements were set up in order to isolate sample children and to prevent contamination of children not yet interviewed. Correlations, frequency counts and rankings were calculated in order to answer the major conceptual hypotheses and research questions, The ranking of the top six most frequently mentioned television shows were viewed six times in order to assess occupational role portrayals. The results of this task were used in correlations between teacher perceptions with actual role portrayals.

Findings

1. Ninety-five percent of the children named an occupational choice for adulthood.

Table I

RANKINGS OF BOY AND GIRL MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED OCCUPATIONS

| | BOYS | | GIRLS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Policeman | 1 | Doctor |
| 2 | Fireman | 2 | Nurse |
| 5 | Farmer | 3 | Mommy |
| 5 | Builder | 4.5 | Policeman |
| 5 | Engineer | 4.5 | Teacher |
| 5 | Daddy | 6 | Ballerina |
| 5 | Athlete | 7.5 | Cowboy |
| | | 7.5 | Busdriver |

2. There was a strong relationship between the occupational choice prestige levels of boys and girls with the occupational prestige level of their favorite television character's occupation.
3. Boys named 21 occupations as compared to 14 chosen by the girls. Girls more often chose a parent role as an occupation than boys, that is, growing up to be a "mommy". See Table I
4. There was a tendency toward a little and moderate relationship between occupational choice prestige level of some boys and girls with their same sex parent.
5. There were stronger correlations between the occupational prestige levels of boys and girls with their favorite television character than with their same sex parent.
6. Teachers were more aware of the occupational choice of boys than girls in their classrooms.
7. Teachers were aware to only a small extent of the roles portrayed on the six most frequently mentioned television shows. The six most frequently mentioned shows were: 1) "Batman" 2) "Bugs Bunny" 3) "Sesame Street" 4) "Flintstones" 5) "Happy Days" 6) "Roadrunner"

Conclusions

1. The impact of the influence of favorite television characters was indicated in the finding of a high relationship between the child's occupational choice with the occupation of the favorite television character for boys and girls. Teachers were not aware of this relationship, however. Research reports of the occupational television portrayals indicate stereotyped presentations of men and womem (Busby, 1974; Manes and Melnyk, 1974; Sternglanz and Serbin, 1974; Kaniuga et al., 1974).

The need for adult intervention in order to mediate the reality of television for preschoolers is supported by Lyle and Hoffman's (1972) finding that the vast majority of children do not grasp the reality-fantasy dimension of television characters. Teachers were unable to significantly list the six most frequently mentioned shows or the occupations portrayed on these shows watched by their children. One might conjecture from this finding the need for training for teachers in the curricular application of television viewing. The teachers' awareness of show names by their children was rather limited. In other words, a teacher may know that "Batman" was watched by her children, but her knowledge of the occupations portrayed on "Batman" were rather limited. The teachers were most aware of roles presented on "Sesame Street." One may infer, however, that teachers are not viewing many of the most frequently mentioned shows.

The children interviewed for this study mentioned 91 different television shows when asked to name their favortie television programs. Television is an integral component of the preschoolers' socialization process, offering all types of programming geared to adults ("Kojak," "Baretta," "Donny and Marie") and to children ("Captain Kangaroo," "Sesame Street," "Flintstones"). Since there were no controls on the amounts of television viewing done, one may not accurately assess the relative importance of any certain type of programming preferred by preschoolers. However, in analysis of the six most frequently mentioned shows, one finds children naming shows aired in the weekly afternoon time periods. One may conclude that since these programs are aired five times or more per week, the preschoolers would tend to remember these shows more clearly by name than a favorite show aired once a week.

2. The need for training in using career awareness as a curricular strategy in preschool settings was supported by the finding that teachers are more aware of occupational choice in males than females in the

preschool children they teach. Sex differences were found in the selection of occupations. Males selected more occupations than females--21 as compared to 14.

The finding that more girls choose parent roles as future occupations corroborates the similar finding of Kirschner and Vondracek (1973). However the present study found a contrasting result. Kirschner and Vondracek (1973) report a clustering solely around the occupation of teacher and nurse. The present study indicates that females are clustered around other occupations as well; doctor, policeperson, cowboy, mommy, busdriver, ballerina.

The wide range of female occupational choices seems to be an important finding. Many of the occupations chosen enter into the domain long considered open only to males; doctor, policeperson, busdriver, fireperson, accountant. Although the occupation choice at this young age may not predict later life career choice, the findings indicate some positive effects of the career awareness movement.

3. There is a need to study the interactions of parents as occupational role models with the impact of television portrayals on career awareness in young children. One may note that for some boys and girls a relationship was found between their occupational choice with the occupation of their same sex parent. Additionally, one must note that stronger correlations were found for these same boys and girls between occupational choice and their favorite character's occupation. One may conclude that television portrayals and parent modeling may play a concurrent role in the child's career awareness development. The need for career awareness in early childhood education was supported in this study.

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